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Assessing team leader effectiveness in a higher education institution of North Cyprus

Terin Adali^{a,*}, Fatoş Silman^a^a Department of Educational Administration, Near East University, Lefkosa TRNC, via Mersin 10 Turkey.

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Abstract

The connected higher education systems will be integrated into its local and international environment and open to the world, its education, history, geography, cultures and people. The aim of this research which is still in progress is to investigate new role and meaning of team leadership in connected higher education systems and also provide an assessment tool for team leader effectiveness in higher education. The multiple data were collected by in-depth interviews, research observation rating scaling, and self reports. The research findings indicate that the institute has weak team leadership profile and requires special perspectives and collaborative work environment.

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1. Introduction

Higher Education reform has and will continue to be an important cornerstone of worldwide governments' global development, economic growth, peace and prosperity plans. Connected higher education systems use resources on the evolution of their educational systems. They review the institutional, curricular and evolution framework to create a more flexible, collaborative learning environment for students. Connected higher education systems will provide new opportunities to improve the learning and research experience and to meet the challenges of today's Knowledge society. The European council addresses the importance of ICT (Information and Communication Technologies) for education and training in its resolution of 13th July 2001 by encouraging the member states "to continue their efforts concerning the effective integration of ICT in education and training systems." (Council Resolution of 13 July 2001 on e-learning (2001/C 204/02)) According to the eEurope 2002 Action plan (Flash Europarameter, 2002), the average connectivity of schools to the Internet increased to 93% in Europe.

The connected higher education systems that we are planning for tomorrow will be integrated into its local environment and open to the world, its education, history, geography, cultures and people. It will be an education that facilitates dialogue between the generations, cultures and pupils themselves. Moore & Kearsly (1996) and Roblyer (2006) argue the current school model is obsolete and insufficient to meet current and future demands.

* Terin Adali. Tel.: +0-392-680-2000; fax: +0-392-223-64-61.

E-mail address: tadali@neu.edu.tr.

Managers and leaders in connected higher education will learn how to manage by visions and principles rather than policies and procedures. Beaudoin (2003) notes that leaders, who create conditions for innovative change, enable individuals to share vision and contribute to the management and operationalization of ideas in educational settings. The team leaders for the connected higher education systems require a unique set of skills to sustain networked higher education systems. A network of relationship must be built and nurtured by team leaders to promote and sustain their education methods. They must encourage the expression of diverse points of view while fostering common team problems using innovative, nonautocratic methods. Leading teams in connected higher education systems require some special perspectives and competencies. Team leaders are cross-organization collaborators, infrastructure builders and boundary managers who act as organization designers. They have to transform the organization into a “learning culture” (Conner & Clawson, 2005). Leaders have highly developed competencies in the areas of coaching, collaborating, getting results, facilitation, and barrier busting. The purpose of this research which is still in progress is to investigate new role and meaning of team leadership in connected higher education systems and also provide an assessment tool for team leader effectiveness in higher education. This study therefore bridges the gap of traditional team leadership style and innovative team leadership style by developing new role and meaning of team leadership for networked education systems.

Four core clusters of competencies are proposed for Team Leader Role in connected higher education systems. They are described below:

Table 1 Team Leader Role: Four Clusters of Competencies

Clusters of Competencies	Definitions
Cross-organization Collaborator	Plans to include systems of issues (infrastructure), producer issues (content development) and user issues (access and connections).
Result Driver	Helps team improve performance; gets good results without resorting to authoritarian methods; manages by principle rather than by policy and uses boundaries rather than directives.
Facilitator	Breaks down artificial barriers to the team's performance. Brings together than by policy and uses boundaries rather than directives the necessary tools, information resources for the team to get the job done.
Coach	Maintains authority balance and teach others and helps them develop their potential.

In regards to this, the research sought to find answers to the following research questions:

Q1.0: How does team leadership function in the connected schools education systems?

Q2.0: How does the team leader create commitment and energy in the team?

Q3.0: How does the team leader build a collaboration culture?

Q4.0: How does the team leader share information and data?

Q5.0: How does the team leader focus on results?

Q6.0: How does the team leader helps the team to solve problems?

Q7.0: How does the team leader work actively to remove unnecessary policies, procedures, or work practices that hinder team performance?

Q8.0: How does the team leader discuss specific data about education system performance with the team on a frequent basis?

Q9.0: How does the team leader build-out strategy and plan to include systems issues, producers' issues and user issues?

2. Methodology

The qualitative research model was used to collect data from the participants who are head of administration and pedagogical executives (e.g. professors, director of studies etc.). The multiple data were collected by in-depth interviews, research observation rating scaling, and self reports. They were triangulated and analyzed. In this research, a case study approach was used to investigate and report internal and external collaboration culture, human relationships, experiences, and leadership functions in the higher education institute (Mertens, 1997; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2005; Creswell, 1994).

The Case: The Higher Education Institute in North Cyprus was established in 1988. There are six faculties, one graduate school and one vocational school in this higher education institute. The number of students is approximately five thousands. The total number of academic staff is one hundred ten.

Participants: This research were carried out with twenty two leaders: one rector, two vice rectors, five deans, six directors and eight head of departments and relied on purposive sampling as a method of sampling.

Data Collection Methods and Analysis: The interview questions created by researchers were reviewed by experts and later piloted on twenty two team leaders in the Higher Education Institute. The in-depth interviews ran about sixty minutes. A structured observation checklist also reviewed by experts in order to check the internal validity of the research process.

3. Findings and Results

Preliminary results have indicated that team leaders in the institute required some special perspectives and competencies. The in-depth interview findings demonstrated that the team leadership role in the Higher Education Institute required major change in collaboration, vision development, staff training and infrastructure builder. Research observation rating scale related to team leadership effectiveness is shown in Table 2. These findings indicated that the team leaders sometimes negotiated with all stakeholders on vision, mission, and they all valued the stakeholders' decisions. Additionally, team leaders focused on results and helped the team members solve problems. The leaders, furthermore, are open-minded, and collaborative. Team leaders sometimes clearly stated that sometimes they had boundaries while the team was making decisions. The boundary is simply in the make-believe line that differentiates the team from the environment that surrounds it. In addition, team leaders' technical knowledge was not found sufficient to solve the technical problems.

Table 2 Assessing Team Leader Effectiveness

Coach Statements	Never	Infrequently	Sometimes	Frequently	Always
01 Team leaders make sure that the team has the necessary training to work effectively.					X
02 Deals appropriately with poor performance.		X			
03 Team leaders negotiate with all the stakeholders on vision, mission and valued decisions.			X		
Result Driver Statements	Never	Infrequently	Sometimes	Frequently	Always
01 Team leaders clearly state the boundary conditions within which the team can make decisions.			X		
02 Team leaders focus on results.				X	
03 Team leaders manage the team by a set of guiding principles rather than policy.				X	
Facilitator Statements	Never	Infrequently	Sometimes	Frequently	Always
01 Team leaders help the team solve problems.					X
02 Team Leader work to procure necessary tools and equipment for the team.				X	
03 Recognize when team members were barrier to the			X		

performance of the team and took necessary improment actions.

Cross-organization Collaborator Statements	Never	Infrequently	Sometimes	Frequently	Always
01 Team leaders help in solving the technical problems.		X			
02 Develop the team so that it could manage the day-to-day operations without his/her assistance.			X		
03 Team leaders are open-minded and collaborative.				X	

The self-report results enhance the validity of the observation. The team leaders stated that the leadership role required more moral support and collaboration culture to improve the organization climate and managerial system in the Higher Education Institute. One of the team leader emphasized, “Teams are not recognised and celebrated as a unit. Being a private university the authority structure of the system, limited internal and external collaborations and people seldom entered into collaboration.” The other team leader indicated that the leaders in the Institute had access to relevant and useful collaboration technologies and were encouraged to use them.

Furthermore, our findings with regards to result driving statement revealed that although there was management by a set of guiding principles rather than policy, there was little evidence that this was being practiced within the Higher Education Institute. In terms of professional training for the staff, participants reported that they had over load work distribution and opportunities were not sufficient for professional development and personal growth.

Team leaders had to act as organization designers, infrastructure builders, and cross-organization collaborators. The expanded use of cross-functional teams in organizations means that effective leaders must become skilful negotiators. We have found that in order to be successful in the connected higher education systems, team leaders should have a number of general attributes and skills. They should have highly developed competencies in the area, getting results, facilitation, coaching, and socio-technical system management capabilities.

4. Conclusion

The research findings indicated that the institute had weak team leadership profile and required special perspectives and collaborative work environment. The internal and external collaborations were not practiced effectively. The research provided an assessment tool for the effectiveness of team leaders and new role and the meaning of team leaders in connected higher education systems. Team leaders must practice repeated self-assessment to determine if their team leadership style was appropriate to their connected-higher education system. For further studies, special perspectives and competencies can be developed and shared by other higher education systems.

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